PBASE

MAGAZINE

Premiere Issue

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Editorial Notes

FOR THE PBASE PHOTOGRAPHER COMMUNITY

COVER MODEL: Wanda Bates

"The creative act lasts but a brief moment, a lightning instant of give-and-take, just long enough for you to level the camera and to trap the fleeting prey in your little box"

~ Henri Cartier-Bresson

Editor's Desk

Welcome to the very first edition of the PBase Magazine !
The idea behind this magazine is two fold: First to fuel the desire for photography amongst the community and second, to help each other with the rich experiences and diverse knowledge base that is contained within us.

To be able to do this, each issue will bring to you various tips and tricks contributed by our members as well as featured articles where prominent photographers and/or PBase members will be interviewed on their workflow, what drives them and experiences they have to share.

In addition, we plan to update the user community with the recent happenings at PBASE.COM including tips from various forums for improving our galleries and relevant PBase news.

It is our sincere hope that this effort will increase and fuel the PBase user community feeling and will help us in spreading our knowledge for the benefit of everyone !

We would like to hear from you !

This being the very first edition, we would love to hear back from the readers on new ideas or contributions that could make this magazine grow to be a greater success. If you would like to contribute, suggest or recommend we interview a personality who you think highly of, please let us know at *magazine@pbase.com.*

Featured PBase photographer: Bill Bates

William is 50 years old. He has lived in Utah for over 38 years where he met Wanda, his lovely wife of 24 years. He graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in accounting. He is currently a realtor. He has enjoyed photography for as long as he can remember but only got serious with it about 4 years ago. His passion is wildlife and landscape photography but he recently discovered a love of portrait photography as well.

Q: Bill, your "Picture a day" Gallery of Wanda has been an inspiration to many PADers and photographers alike. Tell us, what drove you to start this PAD gallery?

"Drove", that is an interesting word for getting started on a PAD project. Really it was more peer pressure, drinking and temporary insanity that led to starting the PAD project.

One evening we were sitting around enjoying a beer or two with my nephew Wes Aston. Wes is my photography buddy and we both enjoy nature photography, so we often take trips together. He had started his PAD project back on January 1, 2004. http://www.pbase.com/wes242 Wes had mentioned a time or two that I should start a PAD project too. I guess he didn't want to be the only crazy person doing a PAD.

That evening he brought up the "picture a day" thing again. I told him I had been toying with the idea. Later that evening Wanda mentioned I should take a picture a day of her. She had recently joined a gym and had been working out and was curious to see what she would look like after a year. She had become a bit jealous of my camera because I guess I had become a bit obsessive about digital photography. She figured if she was my model she would be able to get me to focus my attentions on HER again. I thought about it and really liked the idea of shooting a single subject. It would really push me creatively and give me some practice on portraits. I had never really been that good at taking pictures of people. As we discussed the possibility of this project it suddenly hit Wanda that I meant to actually post the pictures on my PBase account. Boy she wasn't going to allow that! She was willing to pose each day for a picture, but did NOT want them posted for the world to see. After about 3 weeks of discussing what I would and would not post I finally convinced her to be my model. The rest is history. We started our PAD project on March 31, 2004.

BILL SAYS:

"Coming up with ideas for the first month or two was easy. The year was a fresh canvas. ….. As time went on it became tougher."

"I looked at all sorts of images, I read, I listened to music, I watched TV. If something struck me I tried to do my version of the image. Often I see an image and start to replicate it and then build on that and do something entirely different. Of course it was the original image or concept that sparked the idea for the image I finally came up with."

PROFILE

NAME: BILL BATES

WEBSITE: WWW.PBASE.COM/SLOWPOKEBILL

FROM: UTAH, U.S.A

PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE: A BIT OF EVERYTHING

EQUIPMENT: CANON EOS 10D, EOS 20D, CANON EF24-70MM F/2.8 L, EF70-200MM F/2.8 L IS, EF 50MM F/1.8 II, EF 135MM F/2.8 SOFT FOCUS, EF-400MM F/5.6 L, SIGMA 15-30MM F/3.5-4.5 EX, TAMRON 180MM F/3.5 DI MACRO, CANON 1.4X II AND 2X II EXTENDERS, CANON 420EX, TWO 550EX FLASHES

Q: How hard is it to keep thinking of new themes every day? A lot of us are very easily frustrated artistically. How do you folks keep the clock ticking?

Coming up with ideas for the first month or two was easy. The year was a fresh canvas. I was doing this for practice at portraiture so I would try the same thing for a few days before moving on to something else. Each time I tried a new style or technique it gave me a few days of new images to fulfill the project with. As time went on it became tougher. If you do the same thing too often it becomes boring for the viewers. As a photographer I take photos for myself, but I also realize that the viewer is important too. Some images, like the July 1st image, I had kicking around in my head before I even started the PAD project. It took me over a year to convince Wanda to do that image. The "egg" photo is another one I thought about for a few months before actually doing it. Sometimes I just see great light and am inspired. I would put Wanda in the light and work from there. We both brought ideas to the table as the project progressed. Many of my favorite images were Wanda's creative ideas. I'm not sure I should admit this, but to keep the

project going I have become a good thief. I would steal ideas. I looked at all sorts of images, I read, I listened to music, I watched TV. If something struck me I tried to do my version of the image. Often I see an image and start to replicate it and then build on that and do something entirely different. Of course it was the original image or concept that sparked the idea for the image I finally came up with.

Q: A lot of your photos seem to have been taken under studio lighting. Would you describe your studio setup for us?

After a couple of months of working with little incandescent bulbs and reflectors we figured it was time to move up to some better lights. I wanted something that was portable, simple and would work with my Canon 10D's ETTL metering. The simple solution was to just use some Canon flashes with stands and umbrellas. So that is what I did. I got a few Canon 550EX flashes, some stands and umbrellas along with a ST-E2 wireless transmitter to fire them. It is a very basic simple and portable system. We use cheap king size sheets for backgrounds. We set it up in our unfinished basement. It is very basic but really gives great results considering its limitations.

Q: What is your typical workflow? Describe a day in the life of Bill and Wanda Bates - how you come upon an idea, plan the environment and take it to execution (including post processing)

Really, this could be a complete series of articles that covered each part of the workflow.

Ideas sometimes come quickly and sometimes we kick them around for months. Picking an environment is another touchy-feely thing. Sometimes you just see great light and use it. For some images we pick the environment when planning the image. Then it is watch the weather and pray for the "Gods" to be with you. We have been very lucky when planning outside images.

Most times I have the image firmly in my head well before I take it. I know how I want the final image to look. Sometimes it takes some experimenting to get the image the way I want. Sometimes we get surprised and we get it on the first shutter click or we stumble onto something better. With lighting, practice really has helped. What once took and hour to work out, we now do in minutes.

After we get what we think will be the image we often load them to the computer, take a look and maybe make adjustments if needed. Outside and on the road we just take lots of pictures, cross our fingers and hope we got a good one.

Describing post processing is very difficult. Every image

"If you do the same thing too often it becomes boring…As a photographer I take photos for myself, but I also realize that the viewer is important"

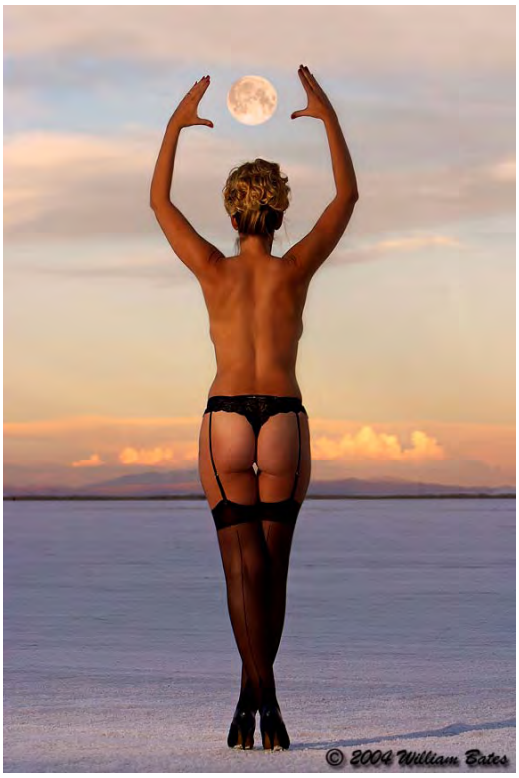
"Most times I have the image firmly in my head well before I take it. I know how I want the final image to look"

is different. Some images are fine straight out of the camera. Others may need to be worked on to achieve the desired results. I'm not a Photoshop wiz; so, I keep things pretty basic with most images.

I shoot most images in RAW, not so much to make corrections, I believe in getting it right in the camera first; but, I shoot RAW because I'm an information hog and a control freak. With a RAW file I can tweak and re-tweak to my hearts content. Many of my photos I print very large. Often they will be 12x18" and larger prints. I find working in 16 bit as long as possible gives me better printed images. So I shoot RAW format. I save that RAW file. I convert it to a 16 bit TIFF file. I work on the 16 bit TIFF making each change in a different layer. When I mess up, I can just dump the layer and start over. When done I save that TIFF file. For images I think are very important I will even save all the layers.

Mostly in Photoshop I'll remove blemishes when needed. Then I will do minor level and curve adjustments. I might make minor color corrections when needed. I shoot and set custom white balance on my Canons and don't need to mess with color very much. One of the advantages of shooting RAW is that I can make minor white balance correction in Capture One LE, my preferred RAW conversion software. Then in Adobe Photoshop CS; I crop, if needed; resize for the web or print. The last thing I do is add a little Unsharp Mask filter as needed. This is always the last step. The levels of USM needed vary from image to image.
For the glamour images I might do a little skin smoothing and softening when needed. For that I just make a duplicate layer and apply Gaussian Blur at about 7%. Then I will use the eraser tool to erase through the layer everywhere but the skin. Then I will lower the opacity to about 20 to 30%. Again the amount of blur and the opacity will depend on the individual image.

To create black and white images I use the Channel Mixer method. With some searching on the web there are very good descriptions on how to do this.



Q: Your galleries feature a lot of stunning landscape work too. Do you define yourself as a portrait photographer or a landscape photographer?

Can I say I'm just a photographer? I enjoy nature photography and glamour photography. I have also had great fun taking sports photos. Really it is all the same. You watch for good light and use it as best you can. Then you hope the picture really gives you 1000 words.

Q: Have you ever thought of commercializing your work?

I'm not sure this counts as "commercializing our work" but we do sell fine art prints. There was talk of making the PAD project into a book but I'm not sure we will ever be able to totally work out the details and get it done to everyone's satisfaction.

For the next year I'm going to really concentrate on stock photography plus work some events. It is time my hobby really paid for itself. I'm also beginning to do more and more "boudoir" photography. Can I say life is great? I'm now getting paid on occasion to take photos of lovely woman in various states of undress. There is nothing better than getting a big hug for having made someone feel beautiful…ok, the pay check is better.

Q: Finally, how did you ever convince Wanda to be such a willing model for your PAD?

Who said she was a willing model? No really she has been fantastic to work with. She makes me look much better than I am. Her ideas are so very often the best. She is also a great photo editor and can pick the best image out in seconds. As I mentioned before, it took about 3 weeks to convince her to cooperate. I just had to agree to not post anything she was too uncomfortable with.

Wanda, thank you for giving me all of your support and I love you Babe.

"For the next year I'm going to concentrate on stock photography plus work some events"

"It's time my hobby really paid for itself"

"There is nothing better than a big hug for having made someone feel beautiful…ok, the paycheck is better "

If you have comments on the interview or would like to suggest your favourite PBase photog to feature, please send an email to magazine@pbase.com

Pro-Corner: Shay Stephens

Shay Stephens is a professional photographer working in New York. He uses a stylish fusion of photojournalism, formal wedding, and studio photography. His commercial clients range from NASA, Ripley's Believe it or Not, to the Sony Corporation. His work is published in many languages around the globe via textbooks, magazines, television, and an array of digital media.

Q: What drives you to be a commercial photographer over other career options ?

I tried a lot of different things once I got out of school. Some I enjoyed and others I didn't. I kept searching for something that I really liked doing. I finally found that "something" in photography. It is emotionally fulfilling for me, its work I like doing and I'm good at it. I get a charge when I do a good job and hear back from the customer how excited they are about the work too. So I would say it's the combination of a job I enjoy and the fact that now I am working for myself that keeps me in photography.

Q: Would you take us through a day in the life of Shay Stephens, the Wedding photographer, on an assignment ?

It typically starts the day before, charging batteries, testing and packing equipment, and going over paperwork related to the shoot. We usually attend the rehearsal and preview all of the venues we will be shooting at and meet the people who will be involved. Then the day of the shoot involves travel to the location, meeting up with the customer, and then breaking out the equipment needed to get started.

When I find myself in a new location, I take meter readings to determine if I need any lighting help from reflectors or flash. When using flash it is important to use just enough, keep the power output as low as is practical. My assistant Jennifer handles the lighting. She keeps an eye on the action and what I am shooting and moves or adjusts the lights as needed. We usually start with the bride getting ready. Makeup, hair, and dress. And usually we also offer some advice if it seems like the bride is getting stressed. They can get caught up worrying about small details that in the end no one will notice if missing, and has no practical impact on their day. So we kindly try to explain that and tell stories of past weddings that help to put her at ease.

A wedding photographer is the only vendor that is with them all day. The wedding photographer's roll is a big one and the success of the day can hinge on you. Keeping them on time, helping to fix problems that pop up, keeping the emotions from overwhelming them, a myriad things that can pop up and your experience in dealing with these types of problems can help keep a small problem from developing into a much larger one.

PROFILE

NAME: SHAY STEPHENS

WEBSITE: WWW.SHAYSTEPHENS.COM

FROM: NEW YORK

PHOTOGRAPHY STYLE: A MIXTURE OF PHOTOJOURNALISTIC AND FORMAL PORTRAITS

EQUIPMENT: CANON DSLR'S, 16-35MM F/2.8, 50MM F/1.8, 70-200 F/2.8 IS, 100MM F/2.8 MACRO

TAKEAWAYS

" Never Underestimate the poor taste of your client "

"What good is having a reception in a beautiful venue if the photos only show bright people and black backgrounds that could have been taken in a garage for all anyone knows?"

"You have to provide the highest quality you can offer, but in the end, the customer decides what it is they want"

We finally make it to the ceremony location and do our setup. Having attended the rehearsal, I already know what needs to be setup without wasting any time on the wedding day. The night before we also talk to the officiant to find out what kind of restrictions, if any will be imposed on photography. Once the ceremony starts my focus becomes very tight. This is the most critical shoot of the whole day.

Formal portraits can be a lot of fun. I try to put everyone at ease and get it over as quick as possible. One of the overriding concerns here is keeping the party on time. So part of the preparation is finding out ahead of time what photos have the highest priority. We shoot highest priority to lowest priority. If we run out of time, I ask if they want to continue and be late to the reception or stop now and shoot the rest later.

Once we get to the reception the lighting gets setup. The goal here is of course to light the subjects, but also capture the look of the venue too. What good is having a reception in a beautiful venue if the photos only show bright people and black backgrounds that could have been taken in a garage for all anyone knows ?
Once the lighting is setup, its lights, camera, action. The dancing and festivities make for some of the most beautiful photos of the day. The interaction of the guests and family lend themselves to so many opportunities for awesome images.

When the dinner finally comes, I am starving! You don't get much of a chance if any to eat during the day, and by the time dinner comes, the energy level needs a boost. So this is an important break. It is also a good time for a break because everyone else is eating and photos of people easting never make good photos anyway.

After dinner then it is a lot of dancing and interaction. I roam around looking for new things I have not shot yet, after an hour or two you usually have captured all the new and unique

things. When it's all over, we say our goodbyes and tear down and pack everything up and head back home. The following week is filled with reviewing photos, making backups, post processing, getting them ready for the gallery, and making the DVD slideshow.

By the end of the week, I am ready to start the process over again.

Q: What, according to you makes a ‘money shot’?

There is no way to predict what the market will be interested in. One funny quote that circulates around photographers is "never underestimate the poor taste of your client". Not everyone has the trained eye to spot high quality photos. So you have to provide the highest quality you can offer, but in the end, the customer decides what it is they want. As they also say, "The customer is always right."
So the only safe thing to do is only show your best work and work you would be personally proud of selling or having on display outside your studio. Too often, a beginning photographer will show all the photos they take and then are horrified when bad photos are chosen. Solve that problem by not making available photos that are bad.

Q: One of your most popular Fine Art photographs is "A tribute in Lights" of WTC, New York. What inspired you to create this rendition?

It was one of those things that just grabbed me. When I saw the tribute on TV in Seattle, I knew I had to get a photo of it.
A year later I was in New York. I had planned out where I wanted to be (roughly) and when I got there I knew I had everything I needed. It took about a week of post processing to get the photo looking the way I saw it in my head. It was instinctual if you will.

Fortunately I had been working on nighttime cityscape photography for a while, so I was prepared to capture what I needed. But it was the post processing that brought the photo to life.

The photo uses the ideal color of the light beam and envelopes the city with it. I wanted the light beams to be energizing the city it draws it's power from, forming a closed circuit of power.

Q: How hard is it to try and make a living out of photography?

It's no secret; it is difficult, especially when you are first starting out. I would say if you could weather the first year and a half and work your tail off to market and promote yourself you should do ok. It just takes time to not only find customers, but to also develop your product line, services, and procedures that motivate a potential client to choose you over your competition.

Just because you have a camera and a lab to make prints is not enough. This is a business, and customers have needs. Part of the work early on is determining what those needs are and how you can fulfill those needs at a price point both you and the customer can live with.

The other challenge is figuring out what your target market actually is. Many beginning photographers have no specialty; they want to shoot anything and everything. But you can't typically do that because there is so much specialized skill and equipment needed to be ready and able to shoot anything and everything that you would need a small fortune to pay for it all.

So my advice to beginners is to try out as many different avenues of photography as they can to determine what they like doing and what they are good at as early as possible.
Then focus on that specialty and drop the other stuff until such time as they have the time and funds to pursue it.

Q: What do you look for when you shoot an image?

I first look for the moment, that short period in time when emotion and interaction meet. I also look for things that are just plain beautiful.
Capturing good-looking stuff is the foundation. People get excited when they look good in a photo; even the unattractive look good when they are genuinely emoting.

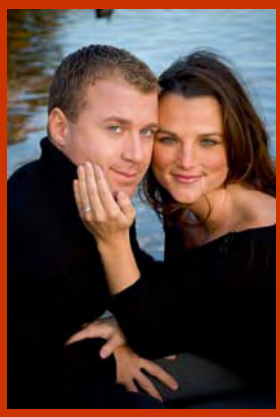
That is where photojournalism (or as I like to practice it, romantic photojournalism) has its strength. I shoot what is actually happening, but I try to only shoot the stuff that looks good and flatters the subjects. When you stage shots and pose people you can loose those real expressions, that real interaction between people. They get too self-conscious about how they look, and in the process make themselves look bad.

Next comes the post processing. I consider it as important as the photography. The photos are the raw ingredients, and the post processing is the oven that makes it yummy :-)

I tend to use colors to evoke an emotional response wherever possible, harmonize brightness and white balance across the many environments so there is a consistency in the look. I take care of zits and blemishes that have a habit of erupting at inopportune times.

Q: Thanks a lot for your perspective. Any last words of advice for budding photographers as they step into the "wild west" of commercial photography ?

Keep striving to improve your quality, artistry, and empathy for your customer, throughout your career. Don't get too caught up in the equipment aspect, empathy and creativity will take you farther than any Gizmo 3000 Super Camera®™© ever will.



WHAT DID YOU THINK ?

If you have comments on the interview or would like to suggest your favourite pro photog to feature, please send an email to magazine@pbase.com

Style Guru: An introduction to Customizing PBase galleries

*Matias Asun (http://www.pbase.com/matiasasun) is a long time PBase supporter and an active forum participant. His photographic artistry is very unique and is accentuated by some very innovative web page customizations at PBase. Here, he spends time helping **Joe**, a new user on how to enter the world of HTML/CSS gallery customizations.*

(certain sections added by Arjun Roychowdhury)

This column is intended to be an introduction for PBase supporters who are trying to understand how to customize their galleries.

Though I will attempt to explain the basics of HTML and CSS, this is by no means an introduction to web page design in general; rather the bulk of the tutorial will focus on issues relevant to PBase gallery design.

Therefore, where needed, I will point you to excellent free resources on the Internet which explain basic web concepts if you wish to read more about them. Also, please do visit the PBase HTML discussion forum where experts provide a lot of good tips to the beginners.

Today we will do some basic CSS manipulation on a gallery. If you are just beginning to hear about these concepts you need to know that HTML codes are generally used to build web pages.

In short, PBase lets you customize your galleries in two ways. First, it allows you to insert HTML code in specific areas (such as the Description box of your gallery). This governs the "content" of your gallery in addition to the images.

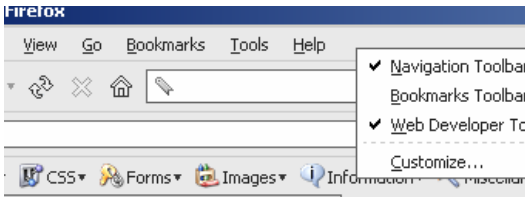
Second, it allows you to specify how the content will actually look when displayed on screen (called CSS). That is why it's called a *Style Sheet.*

To make things easier we will use the Firefox browser and its live CSS editor (called Web Developer). We encourage you to try these tools since it will make CSS editing and debugging easier. You can read more about this wonderful tool here.

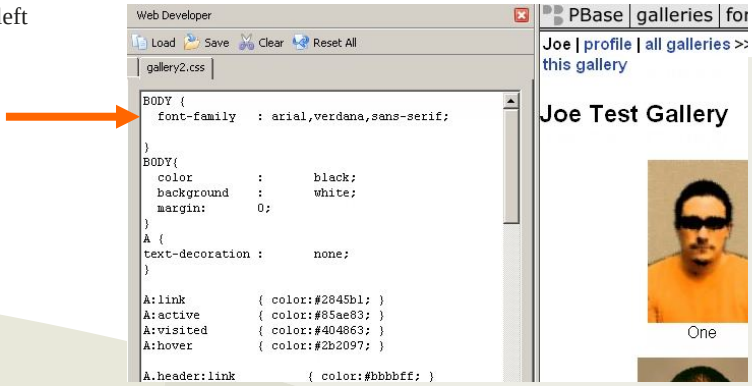
Using these tools, you can play with different styles just to see what they do without actually permanently affecting your gallery. Once you finish experimenting, you can then go ahead and update your PBase gallery permanently.

In this case we are going to start by modifying the <BODY> class that governs your gallery background color, background images, some text and the margins that will be applied to the whole page. (A class is just an identification for a particular display style). OK here we go. Lets have some fun!!

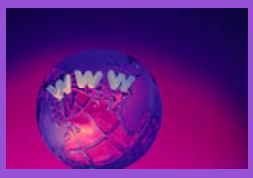
STEP 1: Start your firefox browser, right click at the top of the browser and ensure you have the Web Developer toolbar displayed. Now go to a gallery in PBase that you want to edit (example, www.pbase.com/yourname/testgallery)
After you get there, click on CSS on the Web Developer toolbar and select Edit CSS



STEP 2: A text column should open to the left of your browser like we see here



THE POWER IS YOURS!



PBase offers a lot of design control to make your gallery look as beautiful as you want. Learn to harness this power !

TIP: COMPATIBILITY

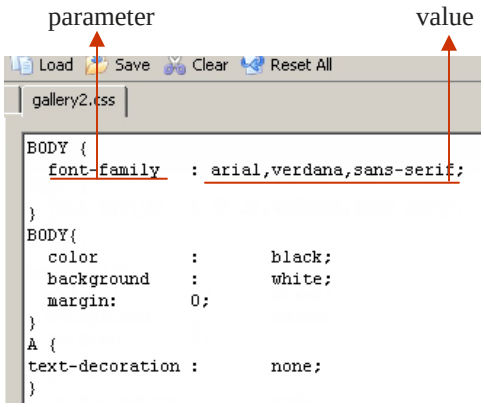
For maximum compatibility, make sure you check your design in Firefox,IE or your favourite browser!

DESIGN VALIDATED ?

Get your HTML/CSS validated for maximum compatibility. However, that would also mean you cannot use some cool browser specific features (example, microsoft filters or mozilla rounded-box-corners). So you decide !

STEP 2: What you are looking at in the text column is PBase's basic style sheet. It is applied to all galleries if there is no other style sheet selected. As you can see there are two <Body> classes. Well both are valid because they talk about different "format parameters"; the first one sets fonts and the second one deals with colors and margins. It is important to note that { and } are opening and closing the parameters for a class. Also note that every parameter has a special syntax

Parameter : Value ;

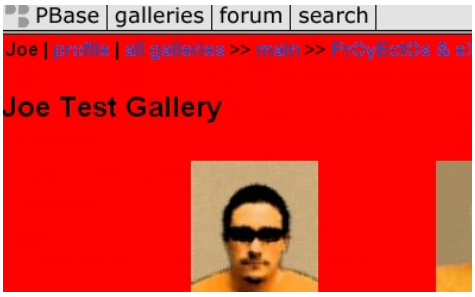


NOTE: If you see the illustration above, you would notice that there are two `BODY` classes (remember, a *class* is nothing but a place to define what that element will look like in your web browser). This is perfectly fine. Your web-browser will combine the properties of both definitions and use it as one. If you wish, you could also manually combine them together by putting all the `parameter: value` definitions into one `BODY { }` definition and deleting the other.

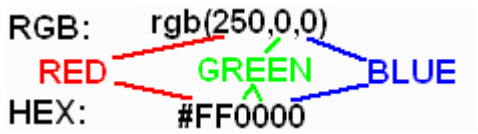
STEP 3: Let's play! Change the background color to "red". The parameters should look like this:

```
background : red;
```

And the result should be a red background just as the image shows.



Note: You can either use standard **color names** (such as red,green,yellow) or use the **RGB** (Red, Green and Blue) notation and **Hexadecimal** (#value) notation. As an example RED is represented by the following code. Those using photo image editors such as Photoshop are already familiar with this concept.



Now that you know how to change a value, play a little with the other values and see what comes out. Note that not all text in the page is going to change by modifying the `font-family` parameter. That's because several other classes are applied to text and links.

Also note that when you click on 'Edit Gallery' in PBase, that screen also allows you very simple customization to your page, like text color. However, if you are using their CSS feature, then all settings are overridden by the CSS you provide.

STEP 4: Now we are going to add one of Joe's images (see) as a background for our gallery using CSS. The first step is to add the following codes into the "**{ }**" space of the <**BODY**> class to obtain what is shown next:

```
background-image:
url(http://www.pbase.com/image/403560
73.jpg);
background-attachment: fixed;
background-repeat: no-repeat;
background-position: 0px 0px;
```

NOTE: `The background-image: and url (…)` should be on the same line. Due to space considerations in this column, we had to split them into two lines.

We just added this

#1 IE TO FIREFOX GROAN:

"I switched from IE to Firefox and now I cannot see the hover effects"

A: Welcome to the world of incompatibility. To solve this make sure that your hover effect uses "a.thumbnail:hover" instead of "a.td.thumbnail:hover"

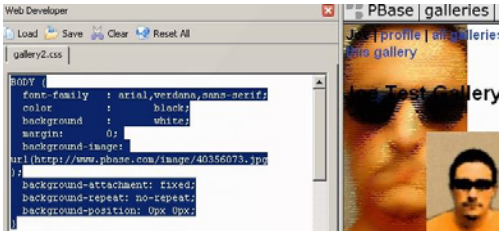
HOW DO I ADD A BANNER ?

A: Edit your gallery where you want a banner, in the description area, type in <img src="http://xxx.jpg"> where "xxx" is the location of your banner image. Make sure "html flag" box is checked in this page.

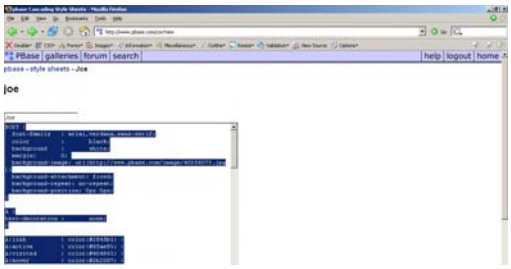
It's important to understand what these various parameters mean:

`background-image: url (..jpg)`	Specifies the URL of the image you want to use. It must be the direct-linked URL (i.e. ending with .jpg)
`background-attachment: fixed;`	The value "fixed" means that the image will be glued to the bottom of the page so if you scroll it will still be in the same position. The opposite is value is "no-fixed"
`background-repeat: no-repeat;`	The value "no-repeat" means that the image will be shown only once. The opposite, "repeat", is generally used if you want to repeat your image all across your page (useful for texture images)
`background-position: 0px 0px;`	These two values set the background image position on the screen. The first value sets the horizontal position and the second value sets the vertical position. "0px 0px" means that the image will be shown on the upper left section.

STEP 5: If you were using Firefox's Webdeveloper none of these changes are saved on PBase yet. To do that you need to **select** and **copy** all the CSS codes on the left (In windows, just do a Select All and Copy)



STEP 6: Now you need to go to the gallery's edit page and click on edit style sheets. Then enter a name (say "joe") in the text box and click on "new css"



STEP 7: Now Paste the code you copied into the textbox PBase displayed after step 6 and click on **Save/Update.**
What you have done is essentially created a new *Style Sheet* named "joe" that will make the background red as well as show a background image for any gallery that uses this Style Sheet.

STEP 8: To use this newly created style sheet all you need to do is to go to any gallery page and click on "edit this gallery". Now **select the style sheet** from the list that will appear (in this case, select the newly created "joe" style sheet) and then update the gallery. *And that's all*!. Refresh the gallery and see the result of your work.

So at the end, I have shown you how to create a new style sheet, change the background color and insert a background image. Not too pretty, eh? Well, I just wanted to give you an idea of "what goes where" if you decide to customize your galleries. I hope you continue to experiment!

Also, do note that you don't need Firefox to be able to edit your styles. IE or other browsers work just as well. It's just that Firefox has this cool WebDeveloper extension that makes it so easy to experiment before actually updating PBase.

Some useful links for further reading:

- Firefox 1.0.1 and the extensions; Web Developer which will help you to do live editing and ColorZilla, which will give you information about the colors of any element on a web page.
- PBase's information about CSS and CSS classes and PBase's default style sheets
- Srijith's PBase.com Unofficial Frequently Asked Questions about HTML and CSS

HOW DO I COPY ANOTHER USER'S STYLE ?

A: Open that gallery in your browser, click on View>Source. At the top of the source, you will see a <link=rel….> tag. The second one is the style you want. Download the .css file pointed to by that section, and open it in any text viewer software. Copy its contents. Now, create your own empty stylesheet, and paste the contents.

But please credit the original author ! It is common courtesy. You may also wish to ask for permission if you like.

Specifically, if the original author has issued a licensing/copyright/copying term in his or her design, please respect it !

WE ARE LISTENING !

Did this section help you ? What else would you like to see covered here ? Please email us at magazine@pbase.com with your feedback !

Pixel Sweeper

A cheaper alternative to commercial Sensor Brushes

by Petteri Sulonen

For some strange reason, people start feeling very strongly about how other people keep their sensors clean. This is probably due to the unfortunate cowardice of most digital SLR manufacturers, Olympus with its ultrasonic cleaning being the notable exception. They simply tell us never to use anything stronger than a puff of air on the sensor, or risk voiding our warranty, destroying our camera, and bringing various kinds of curses upon ourselves and our progeny for *at least* seven generations. As a result, enterprising photographers and some businesses have stepped up to the plate.

There are at least two well-attested sensor-cleaning methods that are known to work on dust that simply refuses to go away by blowing at it. One is the so-called "Copper Hill method" (and variants). The other is the "Sensor Brush" -- a commercial product by a Canadian

company called VisibleDust.

The Copper Hill method involves taking a plastic or rubber spatula, folding a PecPad on it, dropping a few drops of methanol on the PecPad, and then wiping the sensor twice.. However, it does have its risks: while a rubber spatula and a square of optical paper cannot put a scratch on the filter in front of your sensor, a mineral particle caught in it can. While you're certainly not supposed to push hard on the Sensor Swipe, you're still exerting pressure. It's not likely that you'll scratch your sensor with the Copper Hill method, at least if you follow his instructions to the T, but it is possible -- and therefore, in my opinion, less "invasive" sensor-cleaning methods should be preferred whenever possible.

The other, newer technique, glowingly endorsed by some high-profile websites like Luminous Landscape and Rob Galbraith, is the Sensor Brush method. These brushes have the interesting property that when you blow air through them, they acquire a static charge, and become very effective at picking up dust. Lots of people are using them and are getting excellent results. In fact, I believe that this method is at least as effective and inherently safer than the Copper Hill method, for removing dirt that isn't actually stuck to the sensor. The only thing that some people aren't entirely happy with is the price.

WARNING: *If you intend to clean your sensor by following these instructions, be sure to read through* ***all*** *of the article. Using just any old brush on your sensor without first making sure it's clean will give you a major headache that will require lots of swabbing to cure. If you're reading this warning too late, I would suggest the Copper Hill method with distilled water, since glue or size (the stuff they use to stick the fibers together for transport) may not dissolve in methanol.*

First, let's get a few things straight about sensor cleaning:

1. **You're not brushing the sensor: you're brushing the hard glass filter on top of it.** This means that issues like static discharge do not apply unless you're really going overboard with the amount (glass is a very good insulator, and moreover I've never, ever heard of anyone frying their sensor through electrostatic discharge using the VisibleDust technique or any other sensor cleaning method that includes touching the sensor). It also means that the surface is no more nor less prone to scratching than, say, a good UV filter.
2. **You cannot scratch a hard glass filter with a soft brush.** That simply does not happen. The only way you could conceivably scratch it would be by dragging a piece of hard mineral grit across it. While it's theoretically possible that a piece of grit caught in a soft brush lightly dragged across the sensor could leave a mark, I don't believe it's very likely: the Copper Hill method is far riskier in this respect (because the pressure is stronger and there's no place for the grit to "escape," unlike a brush where there's plenty of room between the bristles), yet lots of people use it regularly with no problems.
3. **The big risk is putting more dirt on than you pull off.** As anyone who's tried to clean any optical instrument knows (or negs or slides for scanning or printing, for that matter), dust and dirt is a *royal* pain in the proverbial. Most ad-hoc cleaning methods will make things worse rather than better. And worse than dust are liquid residues -- oil or, in the case of artist's brushes, glue or size.
4. **Any nylon brush will accumulate a charge when blowing air through it: this is a property of nylon.** In other words, there is nothing magical about any sensor brushes in this respect.

Brushes 101

There are two sources of brushes you'll want to consider when looking for a brush that meets the above criteria: make-up (cosmetics) brushes, and artist's brushes. *A soft nylon cosmetics brush. I understand this is called a "mask" brush. Notice the non-conductive acrylic handle.*

THINGS TO REMEMBER

WARNING: *If you intend to clean your sensor by following these instructions, be sure to read through the entire article first !*

"You cannot scratch a hard glass filter with a soft brush. That simply does not happen"

"You're not brushing the sensor: you're brushing the hard glass filter on top of it"

PETTERI SULONEN

In my opinion, cosmetics brushes are preferable, because they're always soft (ladies won't drag something that feels like straw across their cheek) and they're never sized. However, in my brief survey of cosmetics counters around town, I found that cosmetics brushes meeting the above criteria don't grow on trees. There were a few that were about the right size and shape, but they were made with hairs pulled from the behinds of various exotic animals, and a few that were the right material but the wrong shape and size. Eventually I found one that seems to fit the bill: a "mask brush" from a place called Make Up Bar. It passed the Filter Test (see below) with flying colors on the first try, without washing.

A couple of synthetic artist's brushes -- yep, the black one is synthetic too, although it's cleverly faked to look like sable or something like it. Being a Canonian, I figured the black one with the red ring had ***got*** *to be better, but I was wrong -- it had so much size on it I had to wash it five times before it passed the "filter test" below. The other one had barely any size on it and cleaned up with a single pretty light wash. If shopping for artist's brushes, look for a brush that's soft at the store, or at least one where the bristles "snap loose" with a gentle push.* On the other hand, there's a far greater variety of artist's brushes in the right material, shape, and size available. Go to any halfway-decent art-supply store, and look for synthetic brushes. You'll find easily a half-dozen varieties that look approximately right. The trouble is, in all the art stores I visited, the bristles are always sized together for transport. For an artist this doesn't matter, since the size dissolves when you dip it in water -- but for this purpose, it's extremely important to get *all* the size out, not just most of it. This is certainly possible, but an unsized brush is clearly preferable to one with size in it.

So, if you can't find a make-up brush that fits the bill, go ahead and buy a suitable artist's brush. However, do try to find one that has a minimum of size on it -- it should easily "snap" open and become fluffy and soft right away. I made the mistake of trying one that was pretty damn effectively sized, and it took me five careful washes to get all of it out.

Out of curiosity, I tried getting a super-macro of one of my brushes. Here it is. Notice the fine, uniform-thickness, pointy fibers. Just like on the official version...

Cleaning the brush

If you bought a brush that you suspect has or had size in it, or was handled in the store by people with oily fingers, the first thing to do is clean it.

1. Put a drop or two of dishwasher fluid onto your palm, add some water, and roll the brush in it.
2. Work it with your fingers, first against your palm and then under running water.
3. Rinse very thoroughly under a tap, pointing the brush up towards the stream of water so the water flows freely through it.
4. Repeat until the brush no longer feels slimy. It's supposed to feel slippery -- nylon is slippery -- but not slimy. There is a difference that's quite easy to tell.
5. If you live in an area where the water is "hard" (has a high calcium content), rinse the brush in distilled water.
6. Allow to dry overnight before doing the "filter test."

The Filter Test

VisibleDust explains how they tested various brushes

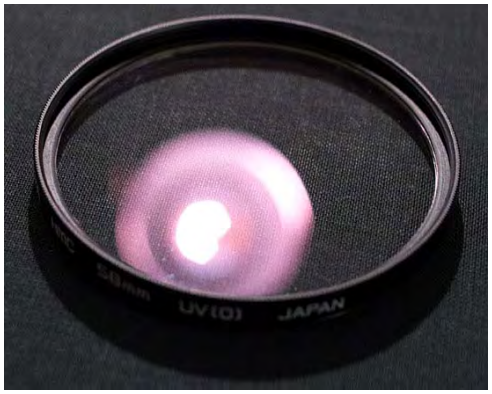
"Any nylon brush will accumulate a charge when blowing air through it… there is nothing magical about this"

Cleaning your brush: Put a drop or two of dishwasher fluid onto your palm, add some water, and roll the brush in it.

If shopping for artist's brushes, look for a brush that's soft at the store, or at least one where the bristles "snap loose" with a gentle push

for residue: by brushing a glass slide 1000 times and then examining it through a microscope for residue. The Filter Test does more or less the same thing. If you have a microscope, I highly recommend you repeat VisibleDust's method, but if you don't, I'm quite certain that my simpler test gives you a result that's reliable enough.

1. **Pick a multicoated filter.** Surely you have one? If not, this is a great excuse to buy one that you've been coveting. Don't worry, you won't damage it. At most you'll get some water-soluble gunk on it that'll wash off.
2. **Thoroughly clean it with your favorite method.** I use dishwasher fluid, work it with my fingers, then rinse it under running water, using the water stream to "wipe" the filter clean; then I dry with a fresh linen towel (one that's been washed without fabric softener).
3. **Examine by looking at the reflection of a lamp.** Multicoats are nice because any gunk on them will shine like a beacon -- it'll affect the reflectivity of the coating. If your filter's clean, you should see a very dim, green*ish*, orange*ish*, or violet*ish* reflection of your lamp, with perhaps a few marks from an imperfect cleaning job.



This is how a clean filter should look -- a colored, pretty dim reflection, and no markings. Start with this. If it still looks like this after you did the brushing, your brush is safe.

4. **Take your brush, and brush the filter vigorously back and forth about 250 times.**
5. **Examine the filter again.** If there was anything evil on the brush, you will see something that looks like a pattern of very, very fine scratches, clearly visible as more reflective against the nearly-non-reflective background of the multicoated filter. They're not scratches: they'll come off if you wash the filter again. If there are no such marks, you can be certain that the brush isn't leaving anything nasty behind. Your sweeping was much more vigorous than you'd do for your sensor, so this test is more demanding than at least a couple of hundred times of cleaning your sensor -- a quite a lot.

If you see something like this, wash your brush again (or discard it). This is gunk deposited onto the filter by the brush. It was a bit tricky to photograph, but is even clearer to see with the naked eye.

If your brush failed the test, wash it again. Repeat until it doesn't fail. My first brush failed four times, but came out clean on the fifth. My second one passed with flying colors after the first wash. My first brush was quite solidly sized at the store; I made the mistake of thinking it would come off easily. You don't need to make that mistake -- just pick one with no or very little size on it.

"If your brush fails the test, wash it a gain. Repeat until it doesn't fail."

But is it safe?

I believe it's safe. A multicoated UV filter is extremely effective at showing off even tiny amounts of contaminants. You'll know if you've ever tried to get one really clean. If 500 vigorous passes with a brush leave nothing visible on it, you can be pretty certain two or four gentle passes will leave absolutely nothing on the sensor. Is the "official" brush safer? Make up your own mind. So, no guarantees from me either. All I'm saying is that I believe this method to be safe and effective, I've used it with great results on my camera plus a few others in the family, and I'm continuing to use it. If you screw up your sensor by following these instructions, please let me know so I can amend the instructions to work better. You'll have my commiseration, but that's all -- just what you'd get from other commercial brush vendors

Remember to use a freshly charged battery before you actually start cleaning your sensor

Good to go!

All right, time to clean the sensor -- assuming you weren't scared off by the above paragraph. Here's how to proceed.

First off, **use a freshly charged battery** for all your

cleaning fun. You do *not* want the camera to shut down in the middle of it and snap the shutter and mirror down on your brush.

Before you begin, **take a reference shot:** point your camera at something white, stop down to f/22, throw it out of focus, and shoot a frame, and never mind camera shake. Then examine it in Photoshop (Auto Levels optional.) I *strongly* recommend that you **hold off cleaning if there are only a few boogers on it:** if you get really anal about it, you'll never have a quite a clean sensor, you'll be terribly stressed every time you change lenses, and you'll be cleaning the camera way too often. If there are more boogers than you care for but still not too many, I **strongly recommend the approved Canon method:** just blow air on the sensor with a blower bulb (not canned air). After all, there's always a risk of something going wrong -- for example, if something startles you while you're in the middle of cleaning it, you could make a violent movement and drop the camera, or something along those lines. So, treat the sensor like your lenses -- don't clean it if it ain't dirty.

My 20D sensor pretty much as it was when I got it. Sorry about the funky lighting effect...

1. Clean the air

The first thing you want to do is stack the odds in your favor against getting more dust into the camera than you remove from it. To do this, you'll want to scrub the air of as much floating dust as you can. First, change your clothes. Get rid of any fluffy, linty fabrics you're wearing. Doing the job naked with a shower cap on your head would be ideal, unless you're very hairy, in which case tights would be just the ticket. (Seriously. Nobody's looking. No, I'm not going to post pictures of this bit: you probably wouldn't enjoy looking at my lily-white ass much, and my wife refused point-blank to model for it.) Go to your bathroom, remove any laundry and fluffy towels that may be hanging in it, and turn on the shower. Let it run cold for five minutes or so. This will very effectively circulate the air and scrub out most of the dust. Nope, you won't be able to fabricate microchips in it, but it will be pretty clean, for a while anyway.

2. Clean the chamber

I recommend you use a different brush for chamber cleaning than for cleaning your sensor. This is because the hinges on the mirror flip-up mechanism may contain tiny amounts of lubricant, which may get onto your brush and from there to the sensor.

1. Charge up your brush by blowing air through it for 5-20 seconds or so. Any powerful source of air will do, except your lungs -- you'll spray spit on it. If using canned air, be sure to hold the can upright to avoid spraying propellant into the brush. (If you want to make doubly sure, blow some air at the bathroom mirror -- you'll see any droplets of propellant should it spray them). If you're unsure of whether your air source is safe, try blowing it at a CD or a bathroom mirror: if it sprays anything, it'll be easy to see.
2. Pop off the lens, set it gently to one side.

Gently brush the mirror box everywhere you can reach it.

3. Clean the sensor

1. Charge your Pixel Sweeper by blowing air through it for 5-20 seconds.
2. Select "Sensor cleaning" in the menus. The mirror will pop up and the shutter will open.
3. Gently give the sensor one sweep of the brush, from left to right.
4. Recharge your brush with 5-20 seconds more of air.
5. Gently give the sensor another sweep of the brush, from right to left, to cover the entire sensor.
6. Recharge your brush with 5-20 seconds more of air.

Charge your brush by blowing air through it for 5-20s or so. Any powerful source of air will do except your lungs – you'll spray spit on it

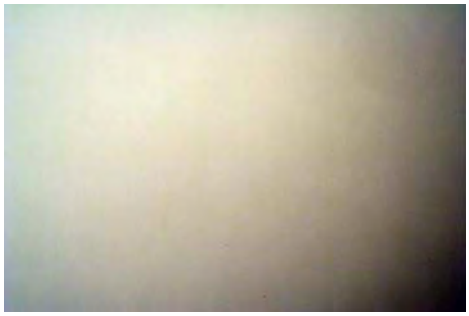
Take a reference shot: point your camera at something white, stop down to f/22, throw it out of focus and shoot a frame

"I recommend you use a different brush for chamber cleaning than for sensor cleaning"

7. Gently give the underside of the mirror, the sides of the chamber, and the bottom of the chamber (including the AF sensors) a light brushing. Light touch, no pressure.
8. Switch off the camera and pop the lens back on.
9. Blow more air through the brush, to dislodge any dust caught in it.

4. Test

1. Pop on the lens and take another test shot as above.
2. Examine the picture. Is it clean enough to satisfy your requirements?
    - If yes, you're done.
    - If not, but it's cleaner than before, repeat "Clean the sensor" above.
    - If not, but it's as dirty as before, stop and try another cleaning method: if it's a new, loose particle, try blowing on the sensor with a blower bulb or hand pump; if it's an old particle that won't budge, try Copper Hill or some other known-to-be-safe "wet" method.
    - If not, and it's dirtier than before, **STOP!** You're doing something wrong, and continuing will only make it worse. Still your panic: it is almost certainly possible to get the new dirt out with some other method, but **DO NOT** continue with your current brush and air.



This is clean enough to satisfy my requirements. Someone more anal than me would probably have gone one or two passes more.

Tips on selecting and handling brushes

A few brushes that are the right size, shape, and material, but may or may not contain size (*do* perform the "filter test!"):

- 1/2" Cotman 777 Winsor & Newton (11mm wide)

White Synthetic for Acrylics and Oils:

- #12 Flat Winsor & Newton Special Value (12mm wide)
- #8 Short Flat Winsor & Newton Special Value (6mm wide)
- #10 Filbert Winsor & Newton Special Value (9mm wide, slightly rounded end)

If you need practice in picking up dust, try getting some dust on your filter and picking it up with the brush. If you have a slide scanner or projector, practice on negatives or slides.

Art-supply stores sell tubes for storing and transporting brushes. They're ideal to keep yours clean.

(Original Article by Petteri Sulonen at http://194.100.88.243/petteri/pont/How_to/a_Brush_Your_Sensor/a_Brush_Your_Sensor.html. This version has been condensed and edited for content, with permission from Petteri. The article is published under a Creative Commons License.)

MORE QUESTIONS ?

Do you need more instructions or is something confusing you ? Let us know !

@PBase.com

Slug and Emily talk about PBase, its past,present,future as well as new features around the corner. And for those who are curious, they are real people and not computer programs ! Surprise !

Q: Who are the hidden faces behind PBase and what do you folks do when you are not maintaining PBase?

PBase is run by Chuck "Slug" Neel and Emily Humphrey.

Slug – PBase doesn't leave much time for anything else. When I want to relax, I work on the camera database or shop for new servers. Sometimes, we eat.

Emily – I just graduated with a BS in Computer Science from The University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Now, instead of going to classes, I have more time to work on PBase. I also love to sew and am a member of two quilting groups in the area. So during my spare time, you can usually find me working on a quilt.

Q: How about a brief history of PBase – where it came from and where it is at today?

Slug – PBase was conceived in July of 1999 after observing countless camera-wielding people who take great photos. I thought they might want an easy way to show their photos to the rest of the world. Since then, it has been a technical challenge to keep up with the growth of the site. We are at a point now where we can start concentrating on bringing more people in to help us.

Slug

Emily

Emily – I met Slug in 2002 and noticed that he could use some help answering emails. So, I jumped in and let him concentrate on maintaining the code and machines. Since then, I have moved more towards developing new features in addition to handling customer support.

Q: In the recent past, there have been some issues related to PBase hosting. Its good to see recent changes – what really happened and are the issues behind us ?

Slug – There was some instability due to a bad combination of heavy traffic and hardware failures – all during our move from one facility to another. In the process, we installed many new servers, which increased capacity and redundancy to move us closer to 100% uptime. We still have a new database server and a completely new storage system to install.

"THEY" SPEAKETH!

"PBase doesn't leave much time for anything else. When I want to relax, I work on the camera database…. Sometimes, we eat"

~ Slug

"I met Slug in 2002 and noticed that he could use some help answering emails…"

~ Emily

"PBase was conceived in July of 1999 after observing countless camera-wielding people who take good photos…"

~ Slug

Q: www.pbase.com/wedding. Is this true or is it an elaborate hoax by another PBase member? Conspiracy theories abound, unless you confirm!

Emily – The rumors are true. We are getting married on July 23, 2005. After that, I will be Mrs. Slug. The wedding will not be anything fancy – just a small ceremony, and then we will go bowling with friends and family afterward.

Slug – I don't know anything about this

Q: How about a sneak peak into some upcoming features for PBase? We know you have been working hard on changes of late.

Emily – I have just set up a new ticketing system to handle emails. It should make a huge difference in the organization and response time of our customer support. I am currently working on a completely new help system, which will make it easier for people to find the answers they are looking for or just learn more about what features are available.

Slug – There are many features that we have planned, some of which I have been promising for a long time. I think we are almost to the point where server maintenance and customer support will take less than 100% of our time, and we will be able to move forward faster on new features. Some of the larger items on the list are an improved comment/messaging system, the ability to order prints, a redesign of the HTML with stylesheets in mind, and statistics graphs to show daily or monthly hits for any image or gallery.

www.pbase.com/wedding is true! Congratulations, to the both of you !

The PBase servers hosted at Inflow

TOOLS written by PBASE users to help you with daily chores:

- Pbaseupload – a tool by Srijith for easy uploading of images
- Pbgrab – a tool by Arjun for downloading images and galleries for easy local browsing
- Pbstats – a tool by Arjun for checking image and gallery statistics

http://forum.pbase.com/viewtopic.php?t=5818 for a more up-to-date list of tools.

Where do we go from here ?

We certainly hope you enjoyed reading the first edition as much as we enjoyed creating it. We are looking for help to continue this effort for future releases.

As of today, this magazine is the collective effort of a few PBase users , working weekends to produce something that hopefully was interesting reading for you. None of us are professional magazine writers/editors/artists – just a bunch of enthused fellas that got together to have some fun.

It was certainly a lot of enjoyment (and frustration) contacting photographers, creating interview sheets and planning layouts for this magazine. The final version came out better than we ever thought which almost made the pains of proof-reading and following up with various people on timeframes worth the effort (*almost*). The entire idea of this magazine is to fuel community spirit and we hope more people come forward to participate in making the next edition an even greater success. Personally speaking, though I enjoyed the role of an editor and I think the results were more than worth it, I do hope some other able PBase member(s) step forward and take on the responsibility of delivering the next version.

If you think you would like to take on the role of editor for the next version, please send me an email at magazine@pbase.com - I would love to discuss the role and expectations in more detail with you. From then on, its your baby, if you wish.

Ideally, the hope is that new members volunteer to contribute something for every new edition so that the magazine keeps itself alive with new ideas and concepts.

- *Arjun Roychowdhury*
www.pbase.com/arjunrc

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If you would like to be featured in the next edition, or would like us to interview someone you are inspired by, please do drop us an email at magazine@pbase.com

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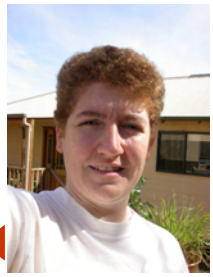
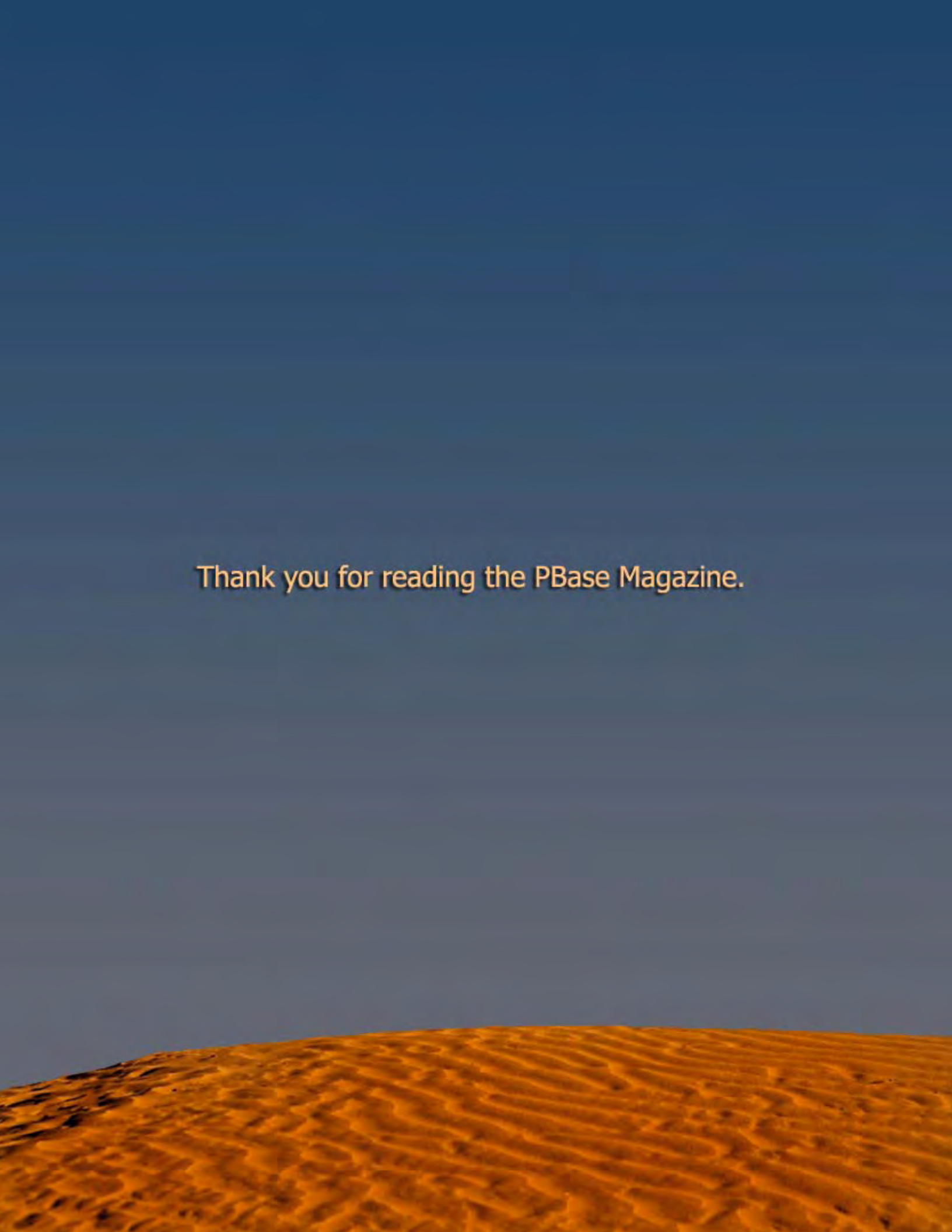


A big "Thankyou" to Slug and Emily for all the backend help involved in launching this magazine

Do you have a different perspective of what should go into this magazine ? Email us !

Join the editorial team ! Email us at magazine@pbase.com


Thank you for reading the PBase Magazine.